

Transportation 3/2/17

Good morning. I'm Chief Bill Forbush of the City of Alpena Fire Department and here today representing the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs and Northern Michigan Fire Chiefs Association. I'd like to thank Senators Dale Zorn, Kenneth Horn, Jim Stamas, and Mike Nofs for sponsoring this bill.

I've been teaching emergency vehicle driving for many years, and am intimately involved in all aspects of emergency vehicle operation. The verbiage in Act 300 that requires rooftop mounting of emergency warning lights, was once applicable only to privately owned vehicles of volunteer or paid firefighters or EMS personnel. It was inadvertently applied to all emergency vehicles in a later revision.

When the law was written, large rotating incandescent, halogen or strobe lights and gutter-mounted lightbars were necessary to achieve the necessary visibility.

As technology has advanced, modern emergency vehicle lighting typically incorporates extremely high intensity LED light sources, making very small fixtures capable of doing the work of the full lightbars of the past. It is now common to mount all of the emergency lighting inside the vehicle while still maintaining the 360 degree arc and visibility range of 500'.

Many government-owned fire chief and fire department staff and support vehicles, EMS supervisor units and virtually all modern ambulances lack roof-mounted emergency warning lights. LEDs are directional and are often mounted on the sides of the vehicles rather than the roof.

Volunteer Fire and EMS personnel often strive to maintain the civilian, low-profile appearance of their family vehicles while being ready to respond when needed. Interior mounted high-intensity lighting enables them to be seen clearly when

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responding, and the lights remain almost undetectable when not in use. With the shortage of volunteer emergency personnel in our communities, it is wise to consider simple ways like this to make their role easier and more desirable.

Ambulances are required to meet the National Highway Traffic Safety Administrations KKK-A11822 series specifications which require mounting warning lights on the sides as noted in this photograph of one of our units. The state law is actually in conflict with the federal standard in this case.

The concern is not that an emergency vehicle operator is going to be cited by law enforcement over where their lights are mounted. The danger lies in potential liability exposure if an emergency vehicle were involved in an accident and, upon investigation, it was found to be non-compliant with the rooftop mounting provision of the law.

Every community in Michigan is protected by a local fire department, and 71% of EMS agencies are fire department based. Each one is lead by a chief officer. The Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs asks for your support of HB 0043 as a simple solution to make the statute more reflective of current best practices, protect communities from unnecessary liability exposure and save many thousands of dollars that would be needed to retrofit existing vehicles with overhead lighting. Thank you very much for this opportunity to address the Committee.

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